

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 00048 021615Z

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5845

INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

USMISSION USBERLIN

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMCONSUL MUNICH

USMISSION NATO

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

S E C R E T MOSCOW 0048

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, EG, UR, IZ, SY

SUBJECT: SOVIET NEW YEAR GREETINGS -- NO BREZHNEV

REF: STATE 283489

1. THE 1975 NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS ON MIDNIGHT TELEVISION AND IN THE JANUARY 1 CENTRAL PRESS WERE SIGNED BY THE CPSU CENTRAL COMMITTEE, PRESIDUM OF SUPREME SOVIET USSR, AND COUNCIL OF MINISTERS USSR. THIS IMPERSONAL FORMAT HAS NOT BEEN USED SINCE 1970. IN 1971 BREZHNEV GAVE HIS FIRST NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS. PODGORNY FOLLOWED IN 1972 AND KOSYGIN IN 1973. BREZHNEV AGAIN GAVE THE GREETING IN 1974. ON BOTH OCCASIONS WHEN BREZHNEV SPOKE, HIS PHOTOGRAPH IN THE CENTRAL PRESS THE NEXT MORNING WAS TWICE AS LARGE AS THOSE OF THE OTHER TWO TRIUMVIRS.

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PAGE 02 MOSCOW 00048 021615Z

2. COMMENT: HAD BREZHNEV APPEARED ON TV IMMEDIATELY AFTER ANNOUNCEMENT OF POSTPONEMENT OF SCHEDULED VISITS TO EGYPT, SYRIA, AND IRAQ, IT WOULD OBVIOUSLY HAVE GIVEN THE LIE TO RUMORS OF POOR HEALTH SPREAD BY LOW-RANKING SOVIETS AS A REASON FOR POSTPONEMENT. AN APPEARANCE BY PODGORNYY MIGHT HAVE FUELED EVEN MORE THE CURRENT RUMORS ABOUT BREZHNEV'S ILL HEALTH. THEREFORE, THE EASIEST COURSE MAY HAVE BEEN REVERSION TO THE EARLIER FORMAT. THERE IS A SPATE OF RUMORS FLOATING AROUND MOSCOW THAT BREZHNEV MAY HAVE AGAIN FALLEN ILL -- BASED ON THE ALLEGED FACT THAT HE RECEIVED FAHMY AND GAMASI LYING DOWN IN A SANATORIUM OUTSIDE MOSCOW AND THAT HE ONLY SAW THEM FOR THIRTY-FIVE MINUTES. WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO VERIFY THESE RUMORS AS YET. BREZHNEV LAST APPEARED IN PUBLIC ON DECEMBER 24, ABOUT THE TIME WHEN THE FAHMY VISIT TO THE USSR WAS HURRIEDLY ARRANGED.
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